



Executive Order 25-16: Governor's Workforce of the Future Challenge Report

September 30, 2025

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Work Group Structure	4
CTE Perceptions Survey	4
Work Group Recommendations	5
PRIORITY AREA: STRENGTHEN WORK-BASED LEARNING, EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	6
Purpose	6
Primary findings	6
Recommendations	6
Executive Order Reference	6
Recommendation A: Create a Statewide Work-Based Learning Innovation Grant	6
Level of Development	6
Resource(s) Required	6
Barriers	6
Leading State Agency	6
Partners	7
Recommendation B: Incentivize Registered Apprenticeships	7
Level of Development	7
Resource(s) Required	7
Barriers	7
Co-Leading State Agencies	7
Partners	7
Recommendation C: Build a Central Work-Based Learning Toolkit	8
Level of Development	8
Resource(s) Required	8
Barriers	8
Leading State Agency	8
Partners	8
Recommendation D: Enhance Workforce Development and Work-Based Learning Opportunities for Non-Traditional Students	8
Level of Development	8
Resource(s) Required	9
Barriers	9

	2
Co-Leading State Agencies	9
Partners	9
Recommendation E: Conduct a Comprehensive Review of Workkeys.....	9
Level of Development	9
Resource(s) Required	9
Barriers.....	9
Leading State Agency	9
Partners.....	9
PRIORITY AREA: EXPAND EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION, SCHOOL COUNSELING, AND ADVISING SYSTEMS.....	10
Purpose	10
Primary Findings.....	10
Recommendations	10
Executive Order Reference	10
Recommendation A: Expand the Current Nine Regional Career Advisors that Focus on Grades 5-12 from Part-Time to Full-Time and Hire Nine Full-Time K-4 Career Advisors.....	10
Level of Development	10
Resource(s) Required	11
Barriers.....	11
Leading State Agency	11
Partners.....	11
Recommendation B: Develop a Digital K-12 Career Exploration Toolkit and Website.....	11
Level of Development	11
Resource(s) Required	11
Barriers.....	11
Leading State Agency	11
Partners.....	12
Recommendation C: Provide Time and Staffing for School Counselors to Focus on the Academic and Career Development Content Area of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program	12
Level of Development	12
Resource(s) Required	12
Barriers.....	12
Leading State Agency	12
Partners.....	12
Recommendation D: Conduct a Comprehensive Review of Missouri Connections	13

Level of Development	13
Resource(s) Required	13
Barriers.....	13
Leading State Agency	13
Partners.....	13
Recommendation E: Elevate Professional Development for School Staff.....	13
Level of Development	13
Resource(s) Required	13
Barriers.....	13
Leading State Agency	13
Partners.....	13
Recommendation F: Hire State-Level K-8 CTE Director	14
Level of Development	14
Resource(s) Required	14
Barriers.....	14
Leading State Agency	14
Partners.....	14
PRIORITY AREA: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING TO PROMOTE CTE.....	15
Purpose	15
Primary Finding	15
Executive Order Reference	15
Recommendation: Launch a Statewide CTE Awareness Campaign.....	15
Level of Development	15
Resource(s) Required	15
Barriers.....	15
Leading State Agency	15
Partners.....	15

Introduction

[Executive Order 25-16](#), issued by Governor Kehoe on January 28, 2025, charged “the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), with the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) as a principal partner, with improving existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) delivery systems in Missouri.” This report describes the two strategies implemented by DESE and DHEWD to assess the status of Missouri CTE delivery systems:

- engaging stakeholders during an in-depth, four-month review of the objectives and guiding principles outlined within the executive order ([see the Governor’s Workforce of the Future Challenge Work Group list](#)), and
- issuing a [CTE perceptions survey](#) to students, parents, educators, and business leaders.

Work Group Structure

The work group required by the executive order included representatives from the following groups:

- DHEWD
- K-12 schools
- Career and Technical Education institutions
- Business and industry partners
- Economic development partners
- Missouri institutions of higher education
- Apprenticeship facilitators and consultants
- Career counseling experts
- Missouri’s Career and Technical Education Advisory Council

A DESE/DHEWD core planning team organized the work group’s membership, timeline, and objectives. The work group met five times from April through July, 2025. During these meetings the group assessed the current CTE delivery system with input from DESE/DHEWD staff and created several proposals for improvements, summarized in this document. Information pertaining to these meetings can be found at the [“Governor’s Workforce of the Future Challenge” webpage](#).

CTE Perceptions Survey

In addition to the work group, DESE, in partnership with the University of Central Missouri, issued a [CTE Perceptions Survey](#) to Missourians during January and February 2025. A total of 5,650 individuals (2,600 students, 766 parents, 1,124 educators, 311 business leaders, and 849 additional respondents) responded to the survey.

This survey revealed strong support for CTE, with 92.3 percent of respondents holding positive views. Many see CTE as a pathway to higher education (90.8 percent) and a way to develop leadership and life skills (82.4 percent and 85.4 percent). Key areas for improvement included the need for increased CTE program access, work-based learning opportunities, and a focus on CTE certification.

The survey underlined CTE program expansion as critical, with comments highlighting the demand for skilled trades like welding, building trades, and automotive careers, alongside needs in culinary arts, cosmetology, law enforcement, STEM fields, healthcare, and business programs. Stakeholders also called for better career exploration for middle school students, English language learners, and those with special needs, particularly in rural areas.

Educators largely agreed that work-based learning opportunities exist, and business leaders (96 percent) emphasized the need for partnerships with schools. Improvements have occurred in recent years, with more businesses collaborating with CTE programs and offering internships and apprenticeships than in the past. However, many small communities still lack such partnerships, raising the question of how to connect appropriate opportunities with students.

Business leaders have a favorable view of CTE skills, with a strong preference for CTE certificates among candidates, though many educators are unaware of the requirements to earn these credentials. There is also a disconnect between parents and educators about the value of industry-recognized credentials, due to a lack of information for parents.

Students are generally aware of college credit transfer from CTE programs, but many parents are unsure about these opportunities. Comments indicate a need for clearer communication regarding college credits and innovative integration of CTE into academic frameworks, addressing logistical conflicts for students and aligning CTE more closely with core education.

Work Group Recommendations

The CTE perceptions survey data provided insight from business and industry and highlighted how students and parents experience CTE programming. The recommendations provided through this survey strengthened the validity of the work group's recommendations, which are categorized into three priority areas:

- Strengthen Work-Based Learning, Employer Engagement, and Workforce Development
- Expand Early Career Exploration, School Counseling, and Advising Systems
- Strategic Communication and Marketing to Promote CTE

The following tables itemize each priority area, providing the purpose of the priority, the primary findings of the work group's efforts, a cross-reference to the executive order objectives, and what resources would be required to implement each recommendation. While some recommendations are actionable with current resources, others will require additional funding and/or personnel to bring to life. The recommendations will be considered for incorporation into DESE and DHEWD's strategic planning.

PRIORITY AREA: STRENGTHEN WORK-BASED LEARNING, EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE

To meaningfully connect students with business and industry, align education with labor market needs, and enhance pipelines that directly link CTE to high-wage, high-demand careers.

PRIMARY FINDINGS

- Creation and expansion of internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and other real-world experiences
- Incentivizing employer participation through grants, recognition, and pipeline development
- Development of statewide models (e.g., Registered Apprenticeships, work-based learning innovation grants, Integrated Education and Training) to scale effective practices
- Emphasis on industry-driven curriculum, client-based projects, and employability skills development

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create a statewide work-based learning innovation grant
- Incentivize Registered Apprenticeships
- Build a work-based learning toolkit
- Enhance workforce development and work-based learning opportunities for non-traditional students
- Conduct a comprehensive review of WorkKeys

EXECUTIVE ORDER REFERENCE

a.1, b.3, b.4, b.5, d, e, f, g

RECOMMENDATION A: CREATE A STATEWIDE WORK-BASED LEARNING INNOVATION GRANT

- Offer tiered funding to schools to establish internships, school-based enterprises, Registered Apprenticeships, and virtual job shadowing
- Prioritize rural and high-need areas
- Ensure employers and industry are articulating the needs and informing the training
- Customize the needs by region

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

- This would be a new DESE effort
- Begin engaging stakeholders to develop a framework that includes a funding structure, criteria, program guidelines, and final recommendations for implementation

RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED

- Funding amount is contingent on stakeholder recommendations
- DESE 1 FTE (\$60,024) to complete this work

BARRIERS

School capacity to access a grant: schools need a low barrier of entry to access the funds in an efficient manner

LEADING STATE AGENCY

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

PARTNERS	● Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development ● Missouri Department Economic Development ● Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations ● Missouri Chamber of Commerce ● Business and industry ● Missouri schools ● Colleges/Universities
RECOMMENDATION B: INCENTIVIZE REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS	
	● Review current incentives for employers to hire youth ● Expand and refine eligibility for employer tax credits ● Provide funding for onboarding and equipment ● Promote emerging technologies (e.g., drones, artificial intelligence) and include high-demand fields ● Research industry-recognized credentials that align with the needs of business and industry ● Research opportunities for career advancement ● Explore employer stipends and wage reimbursement opportunities
LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT	● This is a new DESE effort ● Create Registered Apprenticeship advisory board to provide input to support this recommendation
RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED	● Funding amount is contingent on advisory board recommendations ● DESE .5 FTE (\$30,012) to complete this work
BARRIERS	● Equity and access to funding support, educator training, tax credit allowances ● Federal funding limitations ● Ensuring all areas of the state are represented
CO-LEADING STATE AGENCIES	● Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ● Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development
PARTNERS	● Missouri Department Economic Development ● Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations ● Missouri Chamber of Commerce ● Business and industry ● Missouri schools ● Colleges/Universities ● Labor unions ● Professional associations ● Registered Apprenticeship intermediaries

RECOMMENDATION C: BUILD A CENTRAL WORK-BASED LEARNING TOOLKIT

1. The learning toolkit should include templates to be customized regionally by education and business partners, and should also include:

- alignment with Missouri's high-demand occupations
- employability skills
- plug-and-play instructional resources
- guidance/sample employer agreements
- evaluation tools
- mentor training guides
- guidance for employer involvement
- Work-based learning opportunities (internships, apprenticeships, etc.)
- Industry recognized credentials

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

- This would be a new effort
- Stakeholder engagement required to provide input on resources and toolkit components

RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED

- Reallocation of current resources
- DESE .5 FTE (\$30,012) to complete this work

BARRIERS

- Staff time and capacity
- Changes in high-demand career list

LEADING STATE AGENCY

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

PARTNERS

- Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development
- Missouri Department Economic Development
- Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations
- Missouri Chamber of Commerce
- Business and industry
- Missouri schools
- Colleges/Universities
- Labor unions
- Professional associations

RECOMMENDATION D: ENHANCE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

- Braid CTE and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) resources, including job centers, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation, to provide in-demand workforce development for adults and Missourians with disabilities
- Expand and standardize Integrated Education and Training (IET) opportunities for adult learners and parents to address skill gaps while earning industry-recognized credentials
- Utilize and expand WIOA partnerships with Community Colleges to provide IET and CTE services in currently underserved areas
- Promote WIOA's customized work-based learning opportunities for employers to skill-up their current employees with elementary/secondary skill gaps and employer-determined training milestones

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

- Enhancement of current WIOA Combined State Plan efforts
- This would be a new effort evaluating and aligning resources

RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED	• Realignment or reallocation of current resources • Funding for program expansion, depending on the ability to braid current resources
BARRIERS	• Lack of funding for program expansion (work-based learning and IET) • Funding streams have requirements, limitations, and differences in eligibility etc.
CO-LEADING STATE AGENCIES	• Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education • Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development
PARTNERS	• Missouri schools • Colleges/Universities • WIOA partner agencies • Business and industry
RECOMMENDATION E: CONDUCT A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF WORKKEYS	
• Measure the value of the WorkKeys assessment • Evaluate participation and utilization data • Compare WorkKeys to other assessment and credential tools such as the CTE certificate • Survey employers regarding utility of WorkKeys or other means to describe candidate competencies and skills • Understand the utility of the assessment in the broader Certified Work Ready Community framework including mapping candidate skills to industry and employer needs	
LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT	Begin stakeholder engagement to understand employer and educator perspectives
RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED	Conduct assessments and develop recommendations within existing resources
BARRIERS	Low survey response rates – mitigated by leveraging partnerships and strong promotion
LEADING STATE AGENCY	Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development
PARTNERS	• Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education • Missouri Department of Economic Development • Missouri Chamber of Commerce • Local workforce development boards

PRIORITY AREA: EXPAND EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION, SCHOOL COUNSELING, AND ADVISING SYSTEMS

PURPOSE

To ensure every student K-12 receives continuous, developmentally appropriate support to make informed decisions about future education in relation to job skills and careers

PRIMARY FINDINGS

- Career awareness and exploration frameworks begin in elementary and middle school
- Increased investment in school counseling, career advising, and educator collaboration
- Greater use of tools such as the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP), Missouri Connections, and programs of study
- Scaffolded approaches to help students navigate interest, skill development, and career pathway decisions from grades K-12

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expand the current nine DESE regional career advisors that focus on grades 5-12 from part-time to full-time and hire nine full-time K-4 DESE regional career advisors
- Develop a K-12 career exploration toolkit and website
- Provide time and staffing for school counselors to focus on the academic and career development content area of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program
- Conduct a comprehensive review of Missouri Connections
- Elevate professional development for school staff
- Hire state level K-8 CTE director

EXECUTIVE ORDER REFERENCE

a.1, a.2, b.1, b.2, b.3, b.4, b.5, c, e, g

RECOMMENDATION A: EXPAND THE CURRENT NINE REGIONAL CAREER ADVISORS THAT FOCUS ON GRADES 5-12 FROM PART-TIME TO FULL-TIME AND HIRE NINE FULL-TIME K-4 CAREER ADVISORS

- Provide support to schools in implementing career exploration in grades K-12
- Facilitate personalized planning using tools such as Missouri Connections and the ICAP
- Full-time positions would include a focus on industry, population, and geography in addition to ICAPs, Missouri Connections, and non-traditional events

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

This would require:

- enhancement of current DESE regional career advisor structure that serve grades 5-12
- redesign of the current structure from part-time to full-time positions and expand services to grades K-4

RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED	Additional funding would be required to support current DESE career advisors structure • Estimated cost of \$499,500 annually to expand current DESE part-time career advisors to full-time • Estimated cost of \$999,000 annually to create new DESE career advisor positions for grades K-4
BARRIERS	The nine DESE career advisors, who are housed in Regional Professional Development Center, are part-time and are currently funded through Perkins funding allowing them to only support students in grades 5-12
LEADING STATE AGENCY	Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
PARTNERS	• Regional Professional Development Centers • Professional Organizations

RECOMMENDATION B: DEVELOP A DIGITAL K-12 CAREER EXPLORATION TOOLKIT AND WEBSITE

• Promote all five Missouri Connections platforms (CareerTrek, Junior, High School, College, and Adult versions) to provide a comprehensive K-12 career awareness, exploration, and preparation experience • Include age-appropriate career interest surveys, hands-on activities, and family engagement components starting in early grades • Ensure alignment with developmental stages and academic content that includes the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling program standards and curriculum lessons • Encourage ICAP activities in grade 5 with interest inventories and goal setting • Provide ICAP, Programs of Study templates, and teacher guides for classroom integration, and after school coordination • Include links to DESE regional career advisors, DESE career pathway consultants, rootEd advisors, area career centers, and statewide partners to provide support, transitions, and professional development • Include direct links to statewide resources to promote career exploration and workforce development opportunities • Create one-stop shop website to house toolkit and resources for school and classroom integration • Promote and market the toolkit and resources	
LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT	This would be a new effort
RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED	• Enhancement of current practices • May require additional funding for development ○ Estimated cost: \$50,000
BARRIERS	Lack of funding and human resources, keeping resources updated
LEADING STATE AGENCY	Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

PARTNERS	• Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development • Missouri Department of Economic Development • CIS 360 University of Oregon (Missouri Connections vendor) • Missouri Chamber of Commerce • Business and industry • Missouri schools • Colleges/Universities • DESE career advisors • DESE pathway consultants • rootEd advisors • Regional Professional Development Centers • Professional associations
RECOMMENDATION C: PROVIDE TIME AND STAFFING FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS TO FOCUS ON THE ACADEMIC AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONTENT AREA OF THE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM	
	• Ensure the role and responsibilities of the school counselor align with the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program • Meet the current Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP) or the American Association of School Counselors recommended 1:250 student-counselor ratio • Provide support staff to take on non-school counseling duties and clerical tasks, enabling school counselors to focus on career and academic advising
LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT	This would require enhancement of the current school counselor profession in schools and the school counseling program in the state
RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED	• Incorporate course content on the role of school counselors into educator preparation programs statewide, including those for teachers, administrators, and other educators • A focus group of administrators to address the barriers and brainstorming ways to work with counselors and administrators to ensure that the Comprehensive Counseling Program is being implemented • Funding for additional support staff to help with non-school counselor duties (example, 504 case management) would provide space and time for school counselors to focus on academic, career, and intra/interpersonal development for students grades K-12
BARRIERS	• Lack of requirement to comply with 1:250 ratio • Funding
LEADING STATE AGENCY	Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
PARTNERS	• Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development • Missouri schools • Missouri School Counselors Association • Missouri Association of School Administrators • Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals • Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals

RECOMMENDATION D: CONDUCT A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF MISSOURI CONNECTIONS

Conduct a comprehensive review of online career exploration programs and related online tools for comparisons of features and functionality

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT	This would be a new effort
RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED	Staff timing and potential funding to be determined after comprehensive review and survey findings
BARRIERS	Lack of staff time and capacity
LEADING STATE AGENCY	Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
PARTNERS	• Into Careers through the University of Oregon • Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development • Missouri Department Economic Development • Missouri Economic and Research Center

RECOMMENDATION E: ELEVATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL STAFF

- Offer high-quality externships and workshops for school counselors, educators, and administrators to learn about CTE pathways and local industries
- Provide content-specific professional development in math, science, and language arts, etc. that aligns with workforce and industry expectations

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT	This would require enhancement of current regional Career Pathway Consultant scope of work
RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED	Realignment of current staff duties and funds
BARRIERS	• Regional equity and access to resources • Intentional regional support • K-4 teacher funding access • Educator/staff capacity
LEADING STATE AGENCY	Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
PARTNERS	• Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development • Missouri Department Economic Development • Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations • Missouri Chamber of Commerce • Business and industry • Missouri schools • Colleges/Universities • Regional Professional Development Centers • Labor unions • Professional associations

RECOMMENDATION F: HIRE STATE-LEVEL K-8 CTE DIRECTOR

Provide support to schools in implementing career and technical education programs and courses in grades K-8

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

This would be a new effort

RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED

Additional funding would be required to fulfill this recommendation:

- 1 FTE (\$60,024) to fulfill this work

BARRIERS

Funding is a barrier. Perkins funding is limited to grades five and above.

LEADING STATE AGENCY

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

PARTNERS

Internal

PRIORITY AREA: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING TO PROMOTE CTE

PURPOSE

To increase visibility and credibility of CTE as a viable and valuable pathway to success, and to influence attitudes and decisions about participation in CTE programs

PRIMARY FINDING

Launch a statewide marketing campaign targeting students, parents, educators, and employers

EXECUTIVE ORDER REFERENCE

a.1, a.2, a.3, b.1, b.2, c, d, f, g

RECOMMENDATION: LAUNCH A STATEWIDE CTE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

- Include student and employer testimonials, success stories, and earnings data
- Strengthen the value of the Missouri CTE certificate
- Dispel myths and promote understanding of career pathways
- Include infographics showing CTE-to-career pipelines
- Include posters, brochures, sample social media posts, and QR codes linking to videos
- Update annually to reflect labor market changes
- Tailor marketing to promote underrepresented sectors
- Use targeted social media ads by region based on career cluster droughts
- Plan for sustained marketing
- Create a dedicated revolving “CTE Awareness fund” to support these efforts

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

This would require enhancement of current practices to include the CTE Perceptions Survey, CTE marketing campaign, Show Me Learning that Works Campaign, and Show Me Careers events

RESOURCE(S) REQUIRED

- Reallocation of current resources (robust long-term campaigns will require additional resources)
- Additional funding may be required to support an external marketing partner
 - Estimated cost is under \$250,000

BARRIERS

Funding to incentivize secondary and postsecondary training partnerships

LEADING STATE AGENCY

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

PARTNERS

- Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development
- Missouri Department Economic Development
- Missouri Chamber of Commerce
- Business and industry
- Missouri schools
- Colleges/Universities